



2026

**Spring/Summer Review  
& 2024-2025 Annual Report**  
25 years of nurturing what comes next

Fledgling Northern Rough-Winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)  
Photo by Larry Hubble

## Land Acknowledgement

At *rare*, we take care of over 1,550 acres of land—but we are not the first to do so. Most of the land we steward is on the Haldimand Tract, stretching for six miles on either side of the Grand River. This land belongs to the Onkwehon:we Peoples of the Six Nations of the Grand River. It is also the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit Anishinaabe First Nation. The Mississaugas of the Credit also have a right to the land we care for located on the border of Treaty 3 and Treaty 19 in Wellington County.

We honour and respect the rights and sovereignty of these First Nations and their ancestors. Many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from across Turtle Island (North America) also now live in this area. As an organization started and led by settlers, we make this land acknowledgement to recognize the harm caused by colonization and the taking of land from Indigenous Peoples without consent. These harms have caused pain and injustices across generations and continue to create unfair systems today.

We understand that we benefit from land that was taken. Our goal is to rebuild respectful and fair relationships with the Indigenous nations connected to the land where *rare* is located. We are committed to learning about our responsibilities as settlers and to unlearn the biases and histories that allowed these injustices to happen in what we now call Canada. ■□

## Who We Are, What We Do & Why We Do It

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve is a community-based urban land trust and environmental institute which stewards over 1,550 acres of land across 11 properties in Waterloo Region and Wellington County.

By working with people throughout our community, including local Indigenous Peoples, *rare*'s staff, advisors and volunteers seek to protect environmentally sensitive lands and landscapes for the health and benefit of the local environment, wildlife and current and future generations. Using diverse ways of knowing, we seek to educate the community in the importance our natural areas have in building climate resilience and fostering the health of the environment, and all who live within it.

We believe in honouring place, in conserving diversity, in embracing Indigenous knowledge and in committing to relationships and Indigenous resurgence. We believe in strengthening science, in building diverse, equitable and inclusive communities and in training the next generation to steward these lands for the benefit of all. We seek to offer the community—including Indigenous Peoples, the international community and future generations—not only a diverse network of connected natural areas, but a model of conservation that demonstrates the link between ecological integrity and economic stability, which is critical for the enhancement and quality of life of the planet. ■□

## Message from the Board Chair

Anniversaries provide time to reflect—together. So as *rare* celebrates 25 years of conservation, education and research in our communities, both close and afar, it's natural for us all to look back, remembering the challenges as well as celebrating the milestones along the way.

The newsletters from *rare's* first year—yes, I do have a little collection!—are full of worthy news: the Bald Eagles were overwintering and one article explained their role as bio-indicators of the watershed; the first Environmental Management Plan for the entire property was made available to the community both online and at the four branches of the local library; during a fierce snow storm, Tundra Swans sought shelter near the confluence; 50 species of moss were identified;



and, a steady rhythm of community events were held. This news, stuffed into simple 11x17 bifolds, was made all the more impressive because volunteers were behind every activity and every article!

In fact, volunteers and community input are behind all that *rare* has achieved over its first 25 years. Because of you—because you've made room for *rare* in your life—the organisation has overcome many struggles and grown from a single-site land trust into a national model of place-based conservation with sites across the Grand River watershed. Together, we have learned how to make room for nature in a thriving and growing region.

By securing significant land donations, we've also made our communities more secure. At the same time, heritage infrastructure has been renovated, new education and research programs have been launched, and the organization has become a certified living wage employer.

Anniversaries also encourage us to think ahead. What will the next 25 years be like? Those toddlers of today will be the next generation of leaders and, we hope, land conservationists. Informed by extensive community input, *rare's* Strategy and Plans to 2030 is now up on the website ([raresites.org/about/publications](http://raresites.org/about/publications)) and it, in turn, provides a solid base for the first Master Planning effort that will help envision *rare's* longer-term future.

It's a future full of promise, one that invites us to connect—with each other and with the land. We've learned a lot over the first 25 years. I can't tell you how much your support, in every way, has motivated those charged with *rare's* work on a daily basis to keep going, in spite of the challenges. You've also celebrated with us. And now the vision of a fully realized *rare* Conservation Campus—a combination of institutional programs and spaces that are welcoming, connected and alive with deep purpose—seems entirely within our grasp.

Thank you,

Joy 

## Message from the Executive Director

There's something about holding this year's Annual Report and *rare* Review in my hands that feels a bit different to me. Maybe it's the rich mix of stories and the stunning images taken on the land at *rare*, or maybe it's where I'm at personally right now. This one feels alive in a way that's hard to pin down and has grown into a beautiful magazine of general interest. It deserves a prime spot on coffee and waiting room tables alike.

As you move through these pages, you'll see what I mean. There are the moments of hands-on conservation, including students building turtle nest protectors and realizing how small actions can matter, or volunteers out flipping boards in search of salamanders and quietly tracking the health of our forests. There are the bigger, long-view commitments too, like the protection of the Scrivener property, a deeply cared-for landscape now held in trust for the future.

And then there are the pieces that stretch us a bit, like January Rogers' return for the Sound Walk, inviting people not just to

observe the land, but to encounter it, to stumble into something unexpected. That thread—of curiosity, of not quite knowing what you'll find—has been running through a lot of our work in recent years.

Which brings me to something else I'm really excited about: our new Strategy and Plans document is now publicly available. It's a bit of a window into how we're thinking about the next five years and beyond—not as a fixed roadmap, but as an evolving question we keep coming back to: How do we want to live?


On a more personal note, in April I got certified as a hike leader (yes, officially!) and I'll be taking map and compass training later this month. It's been a reminder that even when you think you know the terrain, there's always more to learn about how to move through it with intention.

I was also in Toronto recently with my Ivey Conservation Leadership cohort, working on conservation systems mapping. I went in expecting something fairly technical

and believed we would emerge at the end of the day with a map that centred around the usual suspects that make and uphold our current systems, and sometimes also hold us back from finding new ways. What stayed with me instead was a conversation about the tension between the technical and the relational in conservation—and how often we default to one at the expense of the other. It resonated deeply with how we approach things at *rare* and strive for balance between the two. The relational has always been a big part of our work—how we connect with land, with each other, with community—and it's something we've leaned into even more intentionally in our new Strategy and Plans. It's not always the easiest path, and it doesn't always show up neatly on a map, but it feels like the one that gets us somewhere different.

So maybe that's the invitation I'll leave you with—slightly tongue-in-cheek, but also not entirely: come get lost with me. In the work, in the questions, in the woods. We'll figure out the map as we go!

With gratitude,

Stephanie 



# All Roads Lead Back to the Land: January Rogers Curates this Year's Sound Walk

By Erin Clark  
Communications & Community Engagement Officer

January Rogers and *rare* first began an artistic relationship in the autumn of 2017. Rogers came as a writer, hanging white corn from the rafters of North House, the solar-powered living lab where she would spend two months as the Eastern Comma Writer-in-Residence. She sat at the edge of the forest and, by her own account, listened to the trees.

Nearly a decade later, Rogers has returned as a contributor to the Long Dash Festival for two years in a row. Last year, Rogers led Percussion Karaoke, and this summer she returns to lead the Sound Walk, where guests are encouraged to explore many of *rare's* trails and stumble upon a series of outdoor musical stations featuring musicians and sound makers from across the region. Rogers is curating a Sound Walk designed not for passive listening, but for encounter.

"It's like walking a trail and stumbling on a flower you've never seen before," she says. "That moment of discovery—that's what turns me on about it."

Rogers has spent nearly three decades building one of the most expansive careers in contemporary Indigenous literature. She is a poet, spoken-word performer, radio broadcaster, documentary producer, video artist, comedian, and publisher. Across all of it, Rogers identifies a single thread: voice. "Understanding that voice is the base of everything has given me permission to explore all these other avenues," she says. "Radio is voice. Performance is voice. Even the physical presence on a stage has a voice because people listen with their eyes as well. It's all storytelling, whatever form it takes."

## What Percussion Karaoke Opened Up

The Long Dash Festival was created through a collaboration between *rare*

and Musagetes, bringing together visual artists, musicians, scientists, naturalists and community members for two days each summer.

In 2025, Rogers opened it with her innovative and experiential Percussion Karaoke. Attendees were welcomed to play a collection of mostly Indigenous instruments: water drums, horn rattles, a large ceremonial drum. While some context was given and a loose structure built around the beat of the big drum, people found their own relationship with what was in their hands.

"It was as much of an experiment for me as it was for everyone else," she says warmly. "I just wanted to see what happens."

What happened was a room full of people who had likely never touched these instruments before suddenly had a story to tell. "Oh, I've now played a water drum."

"Now I know what a horn rattle feels like." For many attendees, it broke open the rest of the festival—a physical, joyful entry point into a weekend built around curiosity and connection.

Rogers sees that as entirely the point. To her, bringing people onto the land and into contact with these instruments is not an educational exercise—it is a return to something essential. "All roads lead back to the land," she says. "And all land is Indigenous land. When you think about it that way, there is endless inspiration in just being here, under this sky, feeling these elements."

## The Sound Walk: an invitation to wander and wonder

This year's Sound Walk extends that philosophy across the landscape of *rare*. Rogers is curating a series of stations along the trails, each featuring a musician or sound maker who will perform and chat with passersby. For Rogers, this Sound Walk is designed to feel less like a concert and more like an afternoon promenade, where stopping to visit is the point.

The lineup is comprised mostly of Indigenous sound makers and is deliberately surprising. Maggie Paulus, a keyboardist from Six Nations, will perform alongside her brother on stand-up bass. Allied Nations, a group Rogers helped form through an Ontario Arts Council-funded songwriting camp, will appear. And a Cree musician from the Kitchener-Waterloo area, known for playing surf guitar, will round out a program that refuses easy categorization.

***"I want to stretch what people imagine when they think about native music."***

"Native musicians encompass and inhabit and claim all the areas and corners that music does," Rogers says. "I knew that early on from my radio days. I want to share that with the people who take part in the Sound Walk."

She also plans an interactive station, a nod to Percussion Karaoke if you will. Visitors can participate rather than simply observe. "Depending on who floats through, it'll be a new experiment every single time," she says.

The ultimate measure of success, Rogers says, is what people carry home. "When folks take it away with them and think, 'I'm going to explore my own relationship with music and sound,' that's when you know you've really done something."

## Still Listening

Rogers' affection for this stretch of land is personal. Coming back, year after year, in new roles, seems entirely natural to her. "Every time *rare* invites me back, something new comes through," she says.

There is always something new in the works. But when asked what keeps drawing her back to *rare* specifically, Rogers doesn't hesitate. It is the land. It is the community. It is the feeling, she says, of standing under an open sky with curious people and seeing what the elements have to say. ■□

**Photo:** January Rogers performing an original rattle song at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Photo by unknown.



# Long Dash Festival

JULY 25-26, 2026

*Exploring the  
intersection of  
art, science,  
& biodiversity*

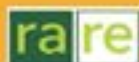
Illustration: Cai Sepulita



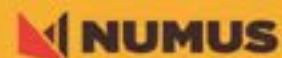
LOCATION:  
rare Charitable Research Reserve – ECO Centre & Slit Barn  
768 Blair Road, Cambridge

[longdashfestival.ca](http://longdashfestival.ca)

PRESENTED BY:



COMMUNITY PARTNER:



# Learning Conservation by Doing It

By Riley McDougal  
Southwood Secondary School Student

This past Fall, I went on a field trip to *rare* as part of Southwood Secondary School's Environment Club. While visiting *rare* I had the opportunity to learn about local turtle conservation and gain hands-on experience, like how to protect these species at risk. Turtles in Ontario face serious threats such as habitat loss, road mortality and nest predation. *rare's* turtle conservation initiative is important to ensure turtles continue to live in this area. My peers and I were lucky enough to have the opportunity to help, making a meaningful impact in our community and on the environment.

During the field trip, staff from *rare* explained their turtle protection program and why turtle nest protectors are an important tool for the conservation initiative. I discovered that many turtle nests never survive to hatching because predators like raccoons can easily locate and destroy them, or because nests are unintentionally disturbed by people. Our small interventions, like using nest protectors, can make significant differences in helping wildlife survive.


Once we learned why nest protectors were

so important, it was time to make some! In small groups, my classmates and I used wooden planks and wire mesh netting. We drilled the wooden frames together, stapled the wire mesh securely in place and decorated the sides with doodles and *rare's* name and phone number. Adding *rare's* name and phone number allows members of the public to recognize the protectors as part of an official conservation project and provides contact information in the case of a nest being disturbed or damaged.

The nest protectors are carefully designed. I learned that each one includes a small opening on the side that allows hatchlings to safely exit once they emerge from their eggs, while still preventing predators from getting access. I appreciated the thought and research that goes into protecting our local wildlife, and sometimes, simple means like nest protectors are

all it takes to reduce nest predation and accidental damage, thereby increasing the chances of turtle eggs surviving to hatching.

On my field trip to *rare*, I discovered the impact of collective action in conservation. Seeing how the protectors increase both nest survival and public awareness reinforced the importance of community-based environmental efforts. This experience showed me how hands-on involvement can create meaningful change and it strengthened my sense of responsibility towards protecting the environment in even the simplest of ways.

If you are interested in learning more about how your students or child can experience hands-on environmental learning at *rare*, please email *rare's* Senior Educator, Istafa Sufi at [istafa.sufi@raresites.org](mailto:istafa.sufi@raresites.org) 

**Photo:** (Above): Southwood Secondary School students working on nest protectors. Photo by Istafa Sufi. (Below): Southwood Secondary School students showing off their nest protectors. Photo by Istafa Sufi.





## Restoring Flow, Reconnecting Habitat

By Tom Woodcock  
Planning Ecologist at *rare*

Restoration of natural features at *rare* is a core goal of our stewardship efforts. In the coming season *rare* will update a past restoration effort and make great progress on a new one.

In 2016, as part of the ongoing restoration efforts at Blair Flats, a flow control structure known as a cross-vane was installed at Bauman Creek. Over time, an old culvert in the creek had broken down, and the stream no longer flowed to the Grand River. Organisms in Bauman Creek were trapped in a small area of habitat. By restoring flow to the stream and working to improve the habitat, fish and other stream dwellers had increased access, and once again could travel to the Grand River. However, the initial structure has broken down over nearly ten years, so a new and improved boulder cross-vane is planned. This will be installed this summer, when it is possible to do so without disturbing nesting fish.

On the south side of the Blair Property, there are two areas of old-growth forest. The giant trees of Ancient Woods, some approaching 300 years old, can be visited on the Grand Allée trail. Forests with

old-growth remnant characteristics are rare in southern Ontario, with most of the land having been cleared for agriculture and/or logged at least once. For about ten years, *rare* has been planting trees to connect these two forests with a corridor of habitat across the fields. However, trees and shrubs are not everything, and this year we will begin a project to complete the corridor and include other habitat elements, such as wetlands, in the corridor. This will benefit numerous species, including Jefferson complex salamanders (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), which live and breed in the forests. The new habitat will increase potential breeding areas, increase the size of the habitat available and make it more likely that the two populations can reconnect.

Thank you to our funders. Bauman Creek project: Region of Waterloo Community Environmental Fund; Corridor project: Habitat Stewardship Program (ECCC), federal, Species Conservation Program (MECP, provincial), Ducks Unlimited.

If you are passionate about restoration projects and want to help future efforts, please email Christine Thompson, Gifts Manager at *rare* at [christine.thompson@raresites.org](mailto:christine.thompson@raresites.org) 

**Photo:** (Above): Eden Mills Boulder Cross-Vane. Photo by Tom Woodcock. (Below): Blue Spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*). Photo by Jenna Quinn



## Scrivener Tract – Protected in Perpetuity

By Tom Woodcock  
Planning Ecologist at *rare*

In October 2025 *rare* acquired our latest property, generously donated by the Scrivener family and permanently protected according to their wishes. This property is 94 acres located in Puslinch Township and has a diverse range of forest and wetland habitat types, including high-quality cedar swamp, open-water ponds and rolling upland hardwood forest with both temporary and permanent ponds. There are also two hay fields leased to a local farmer. A portion of the Puslinch-Mill Creek Provincially Significant Wetland complex, an important part of Wellington County's drinking water system, is protected.

The Scriveners acquired this large property in the 1990s and constructed their home. Their conscientious stewardship over the intervening years has seen the expansion of forested areas and the management of invasive plants. Concerns about nearby development and a changing planning environment at the local and provincial levels of government led them to seek longer-term protection for the land they had come to value for its natural beauty and biodiversity.

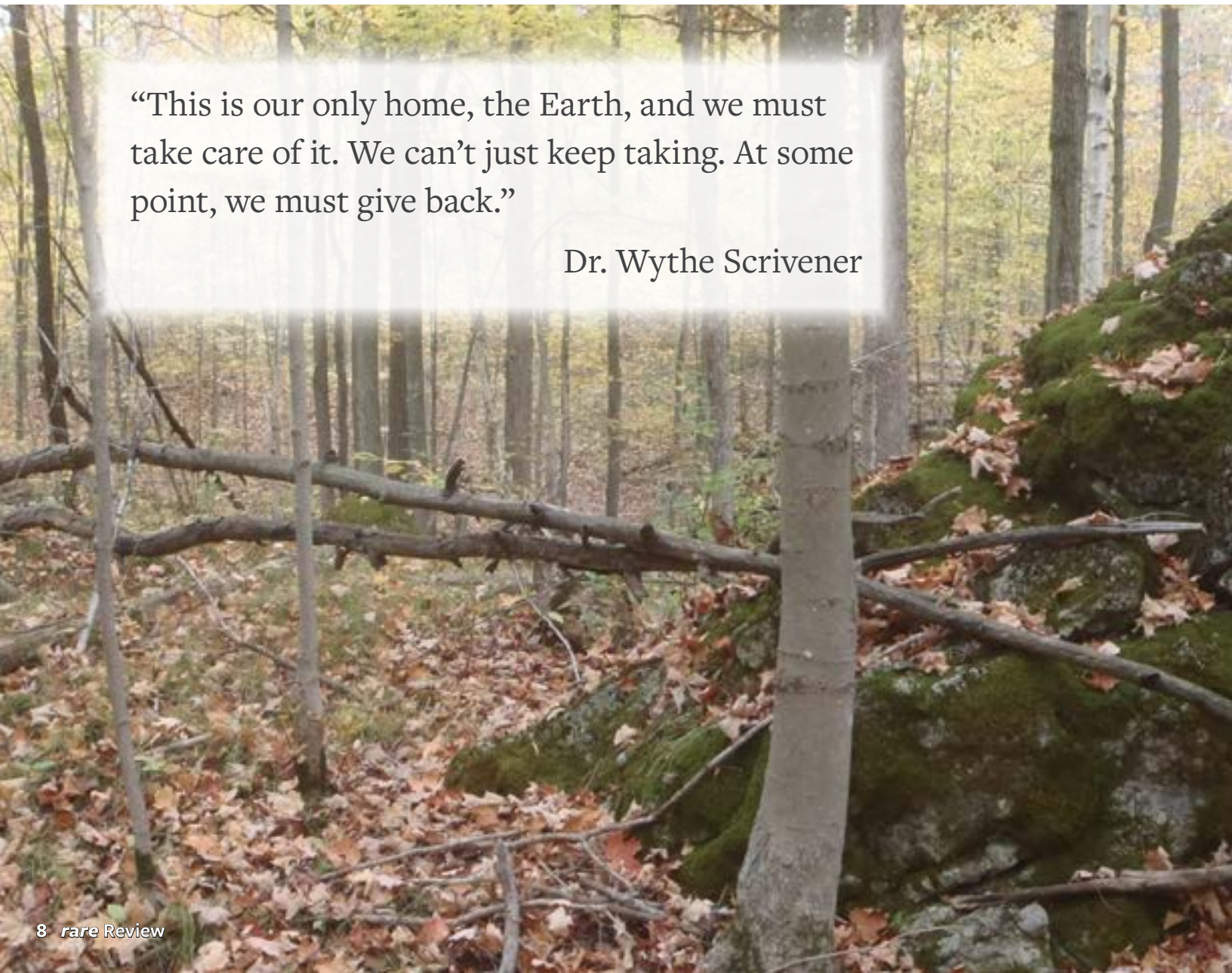
In the coming years, *rare* staff and volunteers will engage in responsible stewardship of the property, including surveying vegetation, developing species lists of flora and fauna, addressing invasive

species and identifying opportunities for restoration and research.

We are grateful for funding received from Environment and Climate Change Canada's Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund (NSCSF) to support the costs of transferring this property to *rare*. The NSCSF supports nature-based projects that promote carbon storage and capture while providing important habitat for species at risk or species of cultural and local importance ■■

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**Photos:** (Below): Scrivener Tract. Photo by Tom Woodcock



“This is our only home, the Earth, and we must take care of it. We can’t just keep taking. At some point, we must give back.”

Dr. Wythe Scrivener

# A Place to Protect, A Legacy to Give Back: An Interview with Dr. Wythe Scrivener

By Erin Clark  
Communications & Community Engagement  
Officer at *rare*

When Wythe and Rosemary Scrivener first came across their property in 1996, it was something of a blank slate—no buildings, just rolling land shaped by glaciers thousands of years ago, and that was exactly what drew them in.

“We wanted a property with no buildings so we could choose where to build and how to make it our own.”

Over nearly three decades, that blank slate became something much more: a deeply personal landscape defined by care, curiosity and connection. From hand-built features like a winding driveway and stone retaining wall to thoughtfully transplanted trees, the Scriveners’ stewardship shaped both the land and their experience of it.

What makes the property truly special, however, is its natural character. Set on a moraine, the terrain rises and falls in gentle ridges, dotted with wetlands and pockets of mature forest that were never cleared.

“We like the rolling topography. It’s not very good farmland, but there are wetlands and areas of mature bush that were left untouched. We like walking it, seeing the changes in the land, and watching the wildlife.”

That wildlife has been a constant presence, deer at the doorstep, coyotes along the wetland edge and a remarkable diversity of birds.

“The coolest bird is probably the pileated woodpecker. We’ve had them at the feeder. Red-headed woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, juncos, chickadees. Even wild turkeys and the occasional hawk.”

Over time, their appreciation for the land deepened beyond observation. Walking the woods, the Scriveners began to see the landscape as part of a much longer story—one shaped by ecosystems and the people who came long before.

“You can imagine Indigenous communities using this land as a hunting ground. It’s been part of a living landscape for thousands of years.”

That perspective helped shape an important decision. As development pressures increased across the area, the couple began to think seriously about the future of their property and what might happen if it wasn’t protected.

“We didn’t want to see it bulldozed and turned into a subdivision. It’s too beautiful. We wanted to give something back and to create a space for wildlife, a carbon sink, something that contributes to the environment.”

After exploring options, they were referred to *rare*. What stood out was a shared commitment and a thoughtful, patient approach.

“It wasn’t pushy. Everything was explained clearly. We walked the property, talked through the details and worked through the process step by step.”

Now protected in perpetuity, the Scrivener Tract represents more than conservation; it reflects a deeply held belief about responsibility and care for the natural world.

Looking ahead, the Scriveners hope the land continues to grow and evolve. They envision reforesting former hay fields, building connections between wooded areas and expanding habitat for wildlife.


“I’d like to see those fields return to forest—native trees, more space for wildlife, more carbon capture. Bringing the land back to its natural state.”

They also hope that one day, others will be able to experience the quiet beauty they’ve come to know so well.

“It would be wonderful if people could walk the trails, appreciate the trees, and just spend time here.”

For other landowners considering a similar path, their advice is simple:

“Do it.”

When you donate or protect your land, it becomes part of a connected landscape of protected areas that support wildlife, clean water, air and soil, research and environmental education. **Are you interested in starting a conversation about making a land donation? Contact Tom Woodcock, Planning Ecologist at [rare](mailto:tom.woodcock@raresites.org) at [tom.woodcock@raresites.org](mailto:tom.woodcock@raresites.org)** 

**Photos:** (Below): Scrivener Tract. Photo by Tom Woodcock



# Community-powered Conservation in Action: Volunteers Help Search for Salamanders to Assess Ecological Health

By Mike McTavish  
Conservation Scientist at *rare*

As a part of our research programs, *rare* monitors key ecological indicators that provide information about the overall health of the ecosystems that we steward. These monitoring programs are made possible through the efforts of community volunteers who help collect this vital research data.

One ecological monitoring program that has been running annually at *rare* since 2009 looks at salamanders to gauge the health of our forests. Salamanders are invaluable biological indicator species because they are very sensitive to changes in their environment—a decline in salamander populations can provide a warning sign of broader ecological trouble.

Between mid-September and early November 2025, 40 volunteers spent over 130 hours searching for salamanders at

*rare*'s Ancient Woods and Hogsback forests. Research teams visited circuits of wooden cover boards that have been placed at both sites to look for salamanders beneath these artificial shelters. Although only *rare* staff with a permit from the Ministry of Natural Resources are allowed to handle the delicate and sensitive salamanders, volunteers help flip cover boards, search for salamanders, and collect other habitat data like temperature and soil moisture.

A total of 204 salamanders were found in 2025 comprising four different species. The most observed species was the Eastern Red-backed Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*), a lungless salamander that breathes through its thin, moist skin. Researchers also found another lungless species, the Four-toed Salamander (*Hemidactylium scutatum*), as

well as two species of larger burrowing mole salamanders, the Yellow-spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) and the Blue-spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*).

Although data from 2009 to 2025 suggest that populations of salamanders at *rare* have remained relatively stable, monitoring also indicates that soils at these sites have gradually become warmer and drier with our

changing climate. These conditions may be challenging for salamanders and other wildlife that rely on moist soil conditions and temporary pools of water for breeding. Supported by volunteer community scientists, *rare* will continue to monitor these populations annually to watch for further changes.

Opportunities to volunteer with the Research department are available from spring to fall. These include assisting with ecological monitoring programs looking at salamanders, birds, snakes, butterflies, vegetation and more. This growing work is being further supported by our new Community Conservation Coordinator role, funded through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which is expanding opportunities for community members to get involved in hands-on conservation, such as our upcoming BioBlitz on Saturday, August 15, 2026. Be sure to save the date so you can join staff and other volunteers in a fun, fast-paced day of species discovery.

**Check our website for seasonal volunteer opportunities** (<https://www.raresites.org/about/volunteer>) or email [research@raresites.org](mailto:research@raresites.org) for more information 

**Photo:** (Above): Yellow-spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) found during monitoring at *rare*. Photo by Jack Robinson (Left): *rare* staff and volunteers observe and measure a lead-backed colour morph of an Eastern Red-backed Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*). Photo by Mike McTavish.



# Co-creating with Nature: Art & Conservation at *rare*

By *Mike McTavish*  
Conservation Scientist at *rare*

Environmental research at *rare* extends beyond the confines of test tubes and transect tapes. Art is among the many diverse forms of inquiry that *rare* supports through its research programs to help address the conservation challenges of today. Artistic creativity can reveal the natural world through a new lens, deepening our relationship with the environment and unveiling new approaches to complex environmental issues.

As a living laboratory, *rare* supports artistic engagement with nature through a variety of programs. In partnership with the Musagetes Foundation, *rare* hosts artistic residencies and the annual Long Dash Festival. Students and community artists also come to *rare* to explore their creative practices and explorations in community and on the land. One such initiative is Lauren Judge's "More-than-human Illuminations" project.

Supported by the Region of Waterloo's Art Fund and *rare*, Lauren's work "illuminates the co-creative abilities of non-humans" (<https://www.laurenjudge.com/more-than-human-illuminations>). Inspired by her



experiences of being in nature, Lauren developed four artworks that encourage us to think about the non-human world around us. These pieces were visible to trail users in fall 2025, installed in cooperation with *rare* staff to prevent harm to the environment.

Visitors to the River Trail might have spotted decaying deadwood adorned with a bracelet of ceramic beads and twine, an oversized cicada husk nestled among the leaf litter, a high-rise "bryo dwelling" for moss and other microorganisms, or a crocheted tent caterpillar nest perched in the crook of a tree. This artwork encourages us to consider natural phenomena that we might otherwise overlook and our shared responsibility to care for non-human beings and spaces.

Watch for future environmental arts projects and events at *rare* including a screening of Lauren Judge's "More-than-human Illuminations" project documentary, followed by an artist lead discussion for the June installment of Conversations for Conservation as well as the 2026 Long Dash Festival happening Saturday, July 25 and Sunday, July 26, 2026.

If you are an artist, project applications for environmental art and research are welcome year-round (<https://www.raresites.org/programs/research/project-applications>). Email [research@raresites.org](mailto:research@raresites.org) for more information. ■ □

**Photo:** (Above): Headshot of Lauren Judge. (Left): "Adorning Deadwood", More-than-human Illuminations, by Lauren Judge. Photo by Mike McTavish (Right): "Bryo Dwelling", More-than-human Illuminations, by Lauren Judge. Photo by Mike McTavish



# Low-Cost Seed Starting for Your Home, Community or Container Garden

By Taryn Jarvis  
Food Security & Facilities Coordinator

Starting plants from seed is one of the most affordable and rewarding ways to grow a garden. Whether you're gardening at home, contributing to a community plot or growing in containers on a balcony or patio, low-cost seed starting can help you save money, grow healthier plants and gain more control over what you grow.

## What Is Low-Cost Seed Starting?

Low-cost seed starting is the practice of growing plants from seeds using inexpensive, reusable or repurposed materials instead of purchasing seedlings or specialty equipment. It focuses on simplicity, using basic supplies such as household items and natural resources to germinate and grow strong young plants.

This approach works for vegetables, herbs, flowers and native plants, making it accessible to gardeners of all experience levels.

## Why Start Seeds on a Budget?

Starting seeds inexpensively makes gardening more accessible and sustainable. Store-bought seedlings can be costly, especially when planting larger gardens

or multiple containers. Seed packets, by comparison, often cost only a few dollars or can be sourced for free, and can produce dozens of plants and surplus seeds to share with other growers.

Low-cost seed starting also reduces waste by reusing household containers, encourages self-sufficiency and allows you to grow varieties not readily available locally. Seed starting also teaches patience, observation and plant care. It is ideal for community gardens, schools and shared growing projects.

## When to Start Seeds

The timing for starting seeds indoors depends on the local climate and the types of plants you want to grow. In southern Ontario, most seeds are started indoors four to eight weeks before your last expected frost date. In Ontario, that's typically late May to early June. Check the seed packet for specific timing recommendations.

## Low-Cost Supplies


You don't need expensive equipment to start seeds successfully. Many supplies can be reused or found at little to no cost. Seeds can be saved from previous plants, acquired at free seed swaps or found at your local library. The Cambridge Public Library has an expansive seed library that is free of charge. Containers can be sourced from the recycling bin. Items such as sour cream or yogurt tubs, takeout containers and pots from previous years can be used, just be sure to add drainage holes. Your growing medium could be homemade compost, a mix of compost and garden soil or an inexpensive seed-starting mix. Seedlings require light, and a sunny windowsill or shelf near a bright window will work. Some people create DIY reflective surfaces using

foil or white cardboard. Water from the tap can be used directly, or you may want to use a little watering can, drinking cup or reuse a spray bottle.

## How to Start Seeds Step by Step

1. Prepare containers. Clean reused containers and poke small drainage holes in the bottom.
2. Fill with soil. Lightly fill containers with damp growing medium. Do not pack it tightly.
3. Plant seeds. Follow the seed packet depth instructions. Most seeds need only a light covering of soil.
4. Water gently. Mist or lightly water to avoid washing seeds away.
5. Provide warmth and light. Place containers in a warm location. Once seedlings emerge, ensure they get plenty of light.
6. Care for seedlings. Keep soil moist but not soggy. Rotate containers to prevent leaning.
7. Harden off before transplanting. Gradually introduce seedlings to outdoor conditions over 7–10 days before planting outside once the threat of frost has passed.

Low-cost seed starting proves that gardening doesn't require expensive tools or supplies, just time, care and creativity. With a few simple materials and a little planning, anyone can grow healthy plants and enjoy the satisfaction of nurturing life from seed to harvest.

**If you are interested in strengthening your gardening skills, practicing seed collection or giving back to your community through gardening, the Springbank Farm Hub team welcomes volunteers of all experience levels every Wednesday starting May 20, 2026. To learn more, email *rare's* Organic Farm Food Equity Steward, Spencer, at [spencer.martin@raresites.org](mailto:spencer.martin@raresites.org) **

**Photos:** (Left): Seedlings in the Springbank Farm Hub greenhouse. Photo by Spencer Martin.





**DONATE TO PROTECT  
THE LAND WITH *rare***

Your donation will make a direct impact by providing essential resources & support where they are needed most.



Scan or visit  
<https://www.raresites.org/donate>  
to donate today



2024-2025  
**Annual Report**

# ra re BY NUMBERS (2024 - 2025)

**1,550+**

Acres of land protected & stewarded

**14**

Kilometres of trails maintained

**~5,415**

Species call *rare* home

**1,810+**

Total volunteer hours

**897**

Generous donors

**127**

Bedrock Club monthly donors

**\$2.02M**

Raised for conservation, research & education

**9**

Participating companies in Corporations for Conservation



*rare* has been a certified Living Wage Employer since 2021

**16**

Young professionals were employed by *rare* as a part of *rare's* summer work experiences

**2,628**

Baby turtles rescued & released

**434**

volunteers

Gave **700** hours to help plant trees/shrubs, pull invasives, steward trails & rescue turtles

**446**

Native trees & shrubs planted and **18** different species are included

**13**

Invasive species targeted

**4,200+**  
pounds

Food grown & donated to the **Cambridge Food Bank**

**251**

Volunteers supported the Foodbank Gardens at the Springbank Farm Hub

**1,040**

Of dedicated volunteer hours at the Springbank Farm Hub

**28**

volunteers

Gave **70** hours to assist with environmental research & monitoring (May - August 2025)

**53**

Scholarships have been awarded since 2009 totalling in **\$137,000**

**2,472**

Children engaged in hands-on ECO environmental education

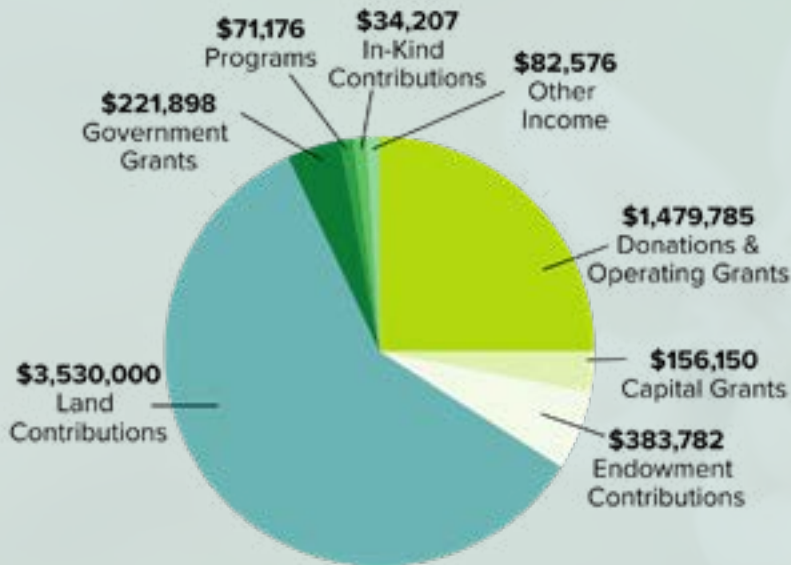
**500+**

Hours children spent outdoors with ECO environmental education

**13**

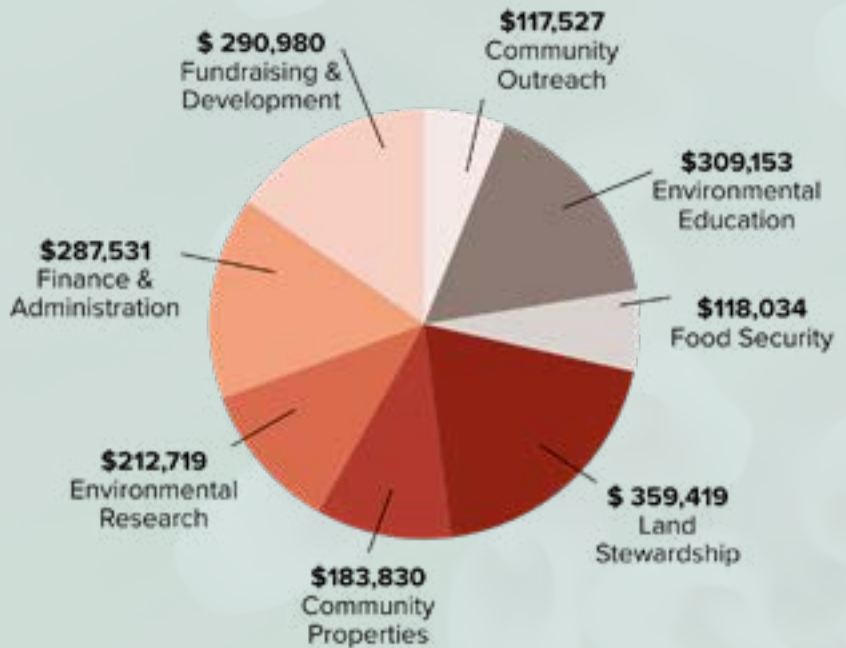
Ongoing arts & research projects at *rare*

For the fiscal year ending August 31, 2025

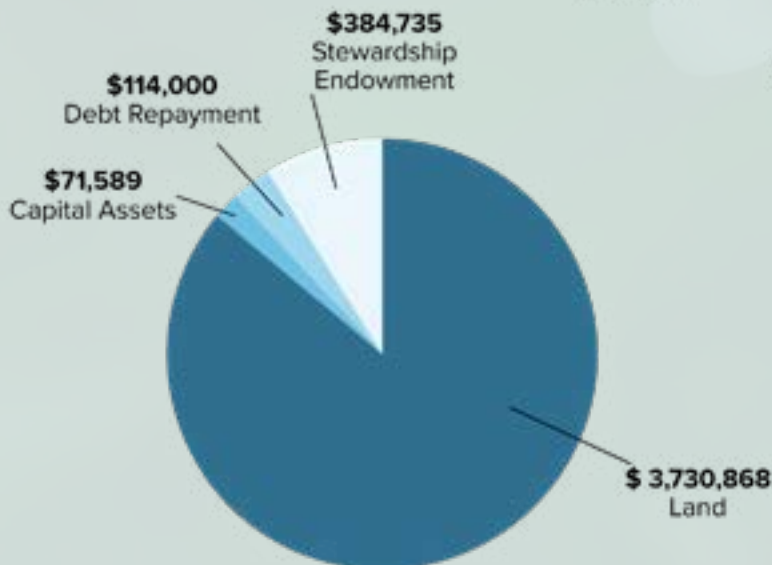


**REVENUE**  
**\$5,959,574**

**EXPENSES**  
**\$1,879,193**



**INVESTMENTS & ASSETS**



**\$4,303,217**

## Condensed Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

For the Fiscal Year ending August 31, 2025

### REVENUE/SUPPORT & ADDITIONS TO NET ASSETS

	Operating	Designated	Endowment	2025	2024
Donations & Grants	1,479,785	156,150	383,782	2,019,717	1,710,608
Government Grants	115,436	106,462		221,898	166,832
In-Kind Contributions					
of Property	0	3,530,000		3,530,000	0
In-Kind Contributions	28,637	5,570		34,207	57,159
Change in Cash					
Surrender on Life Insurance			16,584	16,584	17,816
Land Contributions		0		0	0
Programs	71,176			71,176	59,190
Other Income	63,605	2,387	0	65,992	44,066
<b>Total Revenue &amp; Additions</b>	<b>1,758,639</b>	<b>3,800,569</b>	<b>400,366</b>	<b>5,959,574</b>	<b>2,055,671</b>

### EXPENSES & REDUCTIONS TO NET ASSETS

#### PROGRAM SERVICES

Community Outreach	117,527	0		117,527	107,508
Environmental Education	284,135	25,018		309,153	323,966
Food Security	112,148	5,886		118,034	119,850
Land Stewardship	334,402	25,017		359,419	348,581
Community Properties	176,471	7,359		183,830	184,175
Environmental Research	198,003	14,716		212,719	207,505
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>1,222,686</b>	<b>77,996</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,300,682</b>	<b>1,291,585</b>

#### SUPPORTING SERVICES

Finance and Administration	258,099	29,432		287,531	324,612
Fundraising and Development	251,247	39,733		290,980	284,810
<b>Total Supporting Services</b>	<b>509,346</b>	<b>69,165</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>578,511</b>	<b>609,422</b>
<b>Total Expenses &amp; Reductions</b>	<b>1,732,032</b>	<b>147,161</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,879,193</b>	<b>1,901,007</b>

#### Change in Net Assets

<b>Before Investment Earnings</b>	<b>26,607</b>	<b>3,653,408</b>	<b>400,366</b>	<b>4,080,381</b>	<b>154,664</b>
Investment Income, net	23,871	0	272,294	296,165	277,497
Interfund transfers	-30,776	30,776	0	0	0
<b>Net assets beginning of Year</b>	<b>547,940</b>	<b>8,862,613</b>	<b>3,162,685</b>	<b>12,573,238</b>	<b>12,141,077</b>
<b>Net Assets at end of Year</b>	<b>567,642</b>	<b>12,546,797</b>	<b>3,835,345</b>	<b>16,949,784</b>	<b>12,573,238</b>

#### COMPOSED OF:

Land		12,216,484		12,216,484	8,485,616
Buildings		2,622,795		2,622,795	2,732,078
Other Assets		178,306		178,306	213,922
Endowment Fund			3,835,345	3,835,345	3,162,685
Outstanding Debts		-2,608,449		-2,608,449	-2,725,150
Externally Restricted for					
Capital Projects		137,661		137,661	156,147
Unrestricted	567,642			567,642	547,940
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>567,642</b>	<b>12,546,797</b>	<b>3,835,345</b>	<b>16,949,784</b>	<b>12,573,238</b>

## Thank you, 2024-2025 Supporters of rare!

We are grateful to the following individuals, foundations, government agencies, organizations and businesses that helped *rare* work towards its vision of a sustainable world this past fiscal year (September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025). We want to ensure our recognition reflects everyone appropriately. If there is an error in how your name appears, please contact us at [rare@raresites.org](mailto:rare@raresites.org). Note: entries marked with \* denotes deceased. In-kind donors are in **bold**.

### \$2 million +

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\$200,000-  
\$199,999.99

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Amanda & Andrew Humphreys

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Jiahao Liu  
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Sebastian Lopez Maurino  
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**rare is Proud to Partner with...**

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Ontario Archaeological  
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# CORPORATIONS for Conservation



## RECOGNIZING COMPANIES LEADING THE WAY IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

For some, this designation honours a strong track record of sustainable business practices and meaningful conservation action already underway. For others, it represents a forward-looking commitment supported by *rare's* expertise as they deepen their impact and embed conservation into their operations.

For all participating organizations, it is a powerful statement of purpose. Through an annual investment of \$5,000 over a minimum of five years, these companies demonstrate a shared commitment to protecting nature, advancing sustainability, and building a more resilient future.



**What we're building together:** a simple, steady partnership that backs conservation and community resilience year after year.



# CORPORATIONS

for Conservation Partners



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

13 CLIMATE ACTION



15 LIFE ON LAND



As we fight Climate Change globally while building climate resilience locally, *rare* strives to meet the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** established by the **United Nations** to ensure peace, health and prosperity for all the people of this planet, now and for the future.

Our secondary goals include promoting health, quality education, decent work, reducing inequalities, creating sustainable communities and encouraging responsible consumption for a resilient and inclusive future.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



# Leaving a Natural Legacy

By Christine Thompson  
Gifts Manager at *rare*

A proverb from the 19th century states, “Blessed are those who plant trees under whose shade they will never sit.” This has been the core philosophy of *rare* and its supporters, who have given many resources to protect natural lands across Waterloo Region and Wellington County. We protect the habitats, the foliage, the plants and animals, not just for ourselves, but for our children and our community. At *rare*, we conduct research and run education programs to communicate the importance of these lands, now and for the future, to ensure that these lands will remain protected.

It can be awkward to discuss one’s passing, but it is important to establish your goals and desires for when the moment comes. It’s far better to be prepared early than not to be prepared at all. If you want to ensure that your contributions to nature live on as a legacy for future generations, *rare* has several options.

## Naming *rare* as a beneficiary Bequests

In addition to remembering your family members and friends in your will, you can also name *rare* as a direct beneficiary of specific assets, a portion of your estate or the residue of your estate

can be given to *rare* in your name or in tribute to someone special in your life. Not only does this help build and sustain *rare* for future generations, it can also result in significant tax benefits for your estate.

## Life Insurance

Another way to leave a legacy is to donate a new or existing life insurance policy to *rare*. This will allow you to make a substantial future contribution with a relatively low monthly or yearly payment. Another option could be to name *rare* as a beneficiary on an existing policy.

## RIFF

This applies to donors enrolled in an RRSP or a TSFA or who have already converted their RRSP to a RIFF. You can designate *rare* as a beneficiary for all or a portion of any retirement funds remaining at death.

## Planting Trees in Memory

In addition to bequests, people can follow the proverb to the letter, planting a tree on another person’s behalf to build a natural legacy. There are few better ways to commemorate a friend or a loved one who has passed than by planting a tree in their honour. These living memorials symbolize growth and renewal.

In January 2022, *rare* launched the Forest of Memories initiative, in partnership with Lisaard and Innisfree Hospice. The Forest of Memories allows people to have a tree planted in memory of friends and loved ones while supporting restoration projects on *rare* lands. It’s important to note that while the donations cover the cost of individual trees, the trees themselves are not the memorial. Instead, it is the forest and habitats that these trees build together. A sign beside the Grand Allée trail near the forest lands lists all those honoured in this way.

## Learn More

Including *rare* in your estate plans makes a lasting statement about you and your values. By protecting the health of the environment and our community, we are giving a gift to future generations, ensuring public access to natural spaces and a healthier, more sustainable world.

The information provided above is a generalization and each person’s estate may have different needs. We strongly recommend that you consult your advisor(s) about what works best for you in planning for your legacy. **You can also learn more by contacting Christine at [christine.thompson@raresites.org](mailto:christine.thompson@raresites.org) who would be happy to have a confidential discussion on how you would like to be remembered**

“I realized that *rare’s* motto of ‘intact in perpetuity’ to describe its vision for conservation really provided me with the clarity I needed to put my own ultimate vision in place... *rare’s* Natural Legacy Society [with a gift in my Will] was just the incentive I needed.”

**Carmen Evans**  
Natural Legacy Society Member

## 2024-2025 Forest of Memories Honourees

Wayne Barnard  
Doug & Irene  
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Tony & Brigitte  
Bergmeier  
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Vito Capotorto

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Josef Groh  
Tawndee Gruber  
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Gilbert Howe  
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Jack Kuchma  
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Allan Leppanen  
Larry Makinen  
Viorica Marco  
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Marshall  
Victor Melo

Aubrey Millard  
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Peter Mucha  
Rance Oldford  
Raymond Ramshaw  
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# Leadership

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Ljubodrag Andric, Photographer

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Kehkashan Basu, Founder, Green Hope Foundation

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Ed Burtynsky, OC; Photographer; Subject of award-winning documentary, Manufactured Landscapes

Geneviève Caron, Award-winning Photographer

Severn Cullis-Suzuki, Executive Director, David Suzuki Foundation

Louise MacCallum, OC, retired Software Engineer; Philanthropist; Founder, Musagetes Foundation

Gerry Remers, Former President & COO, Christie Digital Canada & former co-chair Communitech

Jane Urquhart, OC; Author

Frances Westley, Chair of Social Innovation Generation, University of Waterloo

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Don Russell, Qalipu Mi'kmaq/Acadian French Artist

Christopher Watts, Department of Anthropology, University of Waterloo

Bill Wilson, retired Teacher; Naturalist

Brett Woodman, Terrestrial & Wetland Biologist, Natural Resource Solutions Inc.

Tony Zammit, Aquatic & Terrestrial Ecologist, Grand River Conservation Authority

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Lynda McCarthy, Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dan Schneider, Outdoor Educator & Naturalist, Grand River Conservation Authority, retired

Matthew Suhadolc, U-Turn Diversion Teacher, Waterloo Region District School Board

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John Straube, Associate Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of Waterloo

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Valerie Hall (see previous)

Rita Ross, Fundraising consultant

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Kevin Butt, Nature Guelph

Chris Gosselin, retired Manager of Environmental Planning, Region of Waterloo

Lauren Jones, Six Nations of the Grand River

Greg C. Michalenko, Grand River Environmental Network

Bill Mungall, retired

Roger Suffling, Waterloo Region Nature

Tony Zammit (see previous)

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## *rare* Staff

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Evan Krulicki, Community Food Growing Assistant

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Kim Robichaud, Administrative Coordinator

Jack Robinson, Wildlife & Habitat Intern

Rosalind Snyder, Conservation Technician

Istafa Sufi, Senior Educator

Christine Thompson, Gifts Manager

Tom Woodcock, Planning Ecologist

## Contact Us

*rare* Charitable Research Reserve

1679 Blair Road Cambridge, ON N3H 4R8

Phone: 519-650-9336

Toll Free: 1-866-927-3866

Charitable Registration #: 8776 15914 RR0001

donate to *rare* at [raresites.org/donate](https://raresites.org/donate)



# WHAT'S COMING UP

## 2026

APRIL - AUGUST

**YOGA IN THE GARDEN**

Springbank Farm Hub - 681 Blair Road, Cambridge

MAY

**PLANT SALE & ECOMARKET**

Saturday, May 9 | ECO Centre - 768 Blair Road

JUNE - AUGUST

**SLIT BARN SESSIONS  
SUMMER MUSIC SERIES**

Keep an eye on our events page for more details

JULY

**THE LONG DASH FESTIVAL**

Saturday, July 25 & Sunday, July 26 | ECO Centre - 768 Blair Road

AUGUST

**rare BIOBLITZ**

Saturday, August 15 | ECO Centre - 768 Blair Road

SEPTEMBER

**25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

Saturday, September 19 | Main Street, Cambridge

SEPTEMBER

**rare ANNUAL TRAIL PARTY**

Sunday, September 20 | ECO Centre - 768 Blair Road

[HTTPS://WWW.RARESITES.ORG/EVENTS](https://www.raresites.org/events)



Male American Rubyspot Damselfly (*Hetaerina americana*)  
Photo by Jeff Moser & Jeanette Dillon



## 2026 Spring/Summer Review